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# LENIN : STALIN

## TWENTY YEARS OF BOLSHEVISM

### I.—A NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

*The following article, which describes the present stage of Russian industry, is the first of three surveying the evolution of Soviet policy since the foundation of the régime by Lenin in 1917.*

From a Correspondent

The year which sees the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet régime, the inauguration of a new Constitution, and the adoption of a third Five-Year Plan would in any case be a landmark in Russian history. But these auspicious occasions are now eclipsed in the popular mind by the bloody reprisals of the past weeks.

The execution, after a summary trial *in camera*, of eight Army commanders, followed by the wholesale dismissal and arrest of "spies," "wreckers," and "Trotskyists" all over Russia, can indeed be differently interpreted. On one view it is the beginning of the end. This opinion, the wish being father to the thought, has been widely hinted at in the German Press; and it will, perhaps, be shared by those "friends of the Soviet Union" in this country who had been so lately expatiating on the Soviet conversion to democracy. On another view, which is that of the Soviet Press, the recent terror means the consolidation of the Soviet power. And this interpretation seems, on any impartial estimate, the sounder. The Soviet Union is governed by that kind of despotism which is customarily, though perhaps unjustifiably, labelled "Oriental." Cutting off the heads of the tallest poppies has always been a favourite technique of despotism; and the most sentimental historian will hardly deny that it has often been an effective means of consolidating power for considerable periods.

The details of the drama whose principal scenes have been enacted behind the walls of the Kremlin and in the cells of Lubianka are, and probably will remain, unknown. All the evidence suggests that the initiative came from those in possession. M. Stalin struck before his enemies had had time to prepare their blow, perhaps before they were conscious of being his

enemies at all. There has been no trace of any popular movement. Proletarian and peasant have not been called upon to play even a walking-on part. The issue, if issue there was, was a struggle for power between rival or potential leaders. Yet there is no doubt that Moscow has passed through a severe crisis; and June, 1937, may well be treated by the historian of the future as a turning-point in the fortunes of the Soviet régime. It is an excellent vantage point for the observer who seeks to discover what has become, 20 years after, of the Russian revolution.

The central and fundamental fact about contemporary Russia is that the country is in the throes of an industrial revolution comparable with that which transformed Western Europe 100 years ago. It is officially claimed that the industrial production of the present territory of the Soviet Union is now more than seven times, the agricultural production  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times, and the national income four times what they were before the War. The number of workers engaged in industry has risen from some 8,000,000 15 years ago to more than 25,000,000 to-day, and well over a third of the population are now dependent on industry.

Like corresponding movements elsewhere, the Russian industrial revolution is causing a rapid shift of the density of population from country to town. Before the War only 20 per cent. of the Russian population lived in cities; now 35 per cent. is urban. Not only is there a constant drift of population to the towns in search of the better conditions available there, but the birth-rate is soaring in the towns and almost stationary in the countryside. The recently issued figures for the first quarter of 1937 are partially explained by the ban on abortion having been far

more effective in the towns than in the country. But they are sufficiently remarkable to deserve quotation. The increase in the birth-rate over the corresponding quarter of 1936 for the whole Soviet Union was in the neighbourhood of 30 per cent. In Moscow it was not far short of 80 per cent., and in some cities it rose to 90 per cent. Paradoxical as it may seem, the Soviet Union is not so far away from the problem of other industrial States: a depletion of the rural population. All this is merely another way of saying that the Soviet régime has been far more successful in tackling the industrial than the agricultural problem. Ever since Trotsky began to talk of the "scissors crisis" in 1923 the agriculturist in the Soviet Union has had a raw deal. He has been obliged to produce cheap bread and potatoes for the factory worker, while the factory worker has been given no encouragement at all to produce cheap boots and shirts for the agriculturist; and during the past four years the disparity between town and country workers has still further increased. In his new guise as a collective farmer the Russian peasant still, as of old, gets all the kicks and few of the halfpence.

For the Russian industrial worker the Soviet régime has done much. It has given him reasonable security of employment and what is by Russian standards a living wage. According to official statistics the average wage of the worker in Soviet industry for the current year should be about 250 roubles a month. But this figure includes the specialists and the "black-coated workers," who, though they do not wear black coats, seldom get less than 600 roubles, and often twice as much. It may be doubted whether many manual workers outside Moscow and Leningrad (where rates tend to be higher than elsewhere) touch 200 roubles.

With potatoes at a rouble a kilo and rye bread a few kopeks cheaper, the Russian working man at home lives mainly on these staple commodities, eked out perhaps by salt fish and vegetables in season. He rarely sees meat outside the factory dining-room and never butter, which has fluctuated during the past winter in Moscow between 18 and 24 roubles a kilo. (Marshal Voroshilov's preference of guns to butter is less outspoken, but not less effective, than that of General Goering.) A poor shirt costs him a week's pay, and a month's wages will not buy him the shoddiest suit of clothes. Rent is low, though his whole family, including a stray grandparent or aunt, is quite likely to be sleeping in a single room. But the Soviet factory worker has few regrets. He is better off than he has ever been. He is better off than his country cousin. He is better off—so

radio, Press, trade union leader, and party official all conspire to assure him—that the worker in any capitalist country. Soviet Russia is the paradise of the workers.

It would, however, be misleading to accept altogether at its face value the official theory that the Soviet State is run for the benefit of the worker. Economic and social laws do not cease to operate even under Marxist dispensation. The Russian industrial revolution has produced results recognizably similar to those of the western industrial revolution a century ago. It has brought into power in Russia, as it did in the West, not the proletariat which provides the muscles and sinews of industrial production but a new social stratum, appropriately defined as a "middle class," which supplies that production with brains and capital. Nor does it matter that in Russia the owner of the brains is a bureaucrat, and the owner of the capital the State itself. A bureaucrat is a human being, and a State (just like a limited liability company or a bank) is composed of human beings; these human beings have their economic needs and ambitions and create their social tradition. The first instinct of the new Russian bureaucrat—the capitalist and the black-coated worker of the industrial revolution—is to achieve a standard of living which raises him above the proletarian rank and file. He wants better food and lodging, better clothes for his wife, better seats at the theatre, the possibility of choosing his own doctor and consulting him without having to stand for hours or days in a hospital queue, and a thousand other benefits and privileges which in Russia, as elsewhere, are the prerogative of the comfortably off; and, having these privileges, he wants an efficient State machine, with an efficient army and police, to secure him in the possession of them. All these things the new Russian middle class, composed mainly of officials, engineers, managers, clerks, Red Army officers, and professional men of all kinds, is slowly but surely acquiring.

Of the earnings of this new bourgeoisie it is difficult to speak with precision. In money wages the best paid people in the Soviet Union are the artists. A first-class actor will get his 10,000 roubles a month. A popular, but not the most popular, living Russian novelist was recently stated in the Press to be drawing over 100,000 roubles a year in royalties. The highest salary of all is reputed to be that of a jazz-band leader. The manager of the big industrial or commercial trust, the high Government official, and the party boss are in a different category. It would be sacrilege to inquire what is the salary of M. Stalin, or of a people's commissar, or of a Soviet marshal. The salaries officially assigned

to such exalted personages are probably of modest dimensions. But these aces of Soviet political, military, and economic prowess are kept in such magnificence as the Soviet State can provide, including many luxuries which cannot be bought in the Soviet Union for money—private houses and motor-cars, travel facilities, and imported goods. To accumulate would be meaningless, for they could leave their present greatness only for the condemned cell or the penal settlement, where the State continues to provide for their needs on a more frugal scale. They have risen above the level of a money economy.

But in considering the status of this new bourgeoisie, the backbone and principal beneficiary of the Soviet régime, one important reservation must be made. Classes in the Soviet Union have not yet crystallized, and may never crystallize, as they did after the industrial revolution in Western Europe. The proletarian need not remain a proletarian or the peasant a peasant. Already the "Stakhanovite" worker may, by hewing a superhuman tonnage of coal or pulling an incredible number of beets per hour, earn five or 15 times the wages of his

fellows and climb into the well-to-do class. The son of the coal-heaver has as good a chance as the son of a clerk or a commissar of finding his way into the privileged circle. *La carrière ouverte aux talents* is the watchword in Soviet Russia. Classes there are; but a lot of talent and a little luck will clear the barriers between them.

Such a system, however laudable, marks an enormous departure from the principles of 1917. In the early days of the revolution the worker was encouraged to expect that the benefits of the proletarian State would be equally shared between the members of the proletariat. Nowadays the officially stimulated ambition of the worker is to emerge from the ruck, and, in his own person or in that of his children, to enter the deproletarianized and privileged middle class. The change is eminently practical. But the Russian mind has never been content to take the practice and let the theory go; and the task of adjusting the theory of 1917 to the practice of 1937 has been one of immense embarrassment: an embarrassment reflected in all the dissensions which have torn the ruling class in Soviet Russia during the past 10 years.

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## SOVIET THEORY AND PRACTICE

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### II.—A RETREAT FROM UTOPIA

*This second article on Sovietism after 20 years discusses the symptoms of the maladjustment of Lenin's theory and Stalin's practice.*

When Lenin seized power in Russia in November, 1917, his views on the nature of the State were unimpeachably Marxist. The State, being in its very essence an instrument for the oppression of one class by another, was therefore an evil which could have no place in the classless Communist society. In order to win the victory which would lead to the establishment of the classless society, the proletariat must seize the State machine and turn it against their old oppressors, the bourgeoisie. But the State would remain (for such was its nature) an instrument of class oppression; and it would be used as such by the triumphant proletariat to crush the bourgeoisie. This was, however, only a transitional period. The dictatorship of the proletariat, wrote Lenin, was "not an organization of order, but an organization of war."

Once the bourgeoisie had been extinguished or rendered impotent, the State would become a meaningless institution (since there would be nobody left to oppress), and would, in the classic formula of Marx and Engels, "wither away."

In 1917 this Utopian conception, taken over straight from Marx and Engels, was an integral part of Lenin's creed. There is no evidence that his faith in it was ever shaken, though in his last years he once admitted that the transitional period before the State finally disappeared might be "a whole historical epoch." And the odd thing is that this conception still figures in the official creed of the Soviet rulers to-day. It is one of the most curious of contemporary paradoxes that M. Stalin, who has constructed the most powerful and most arbitrary State machine yet known in history, is compelled

from time to time (though more and more rarely nowadays) to affirm that his real aim is the abolition of the State. The formula invented for the last Party Congress does not lack ingenuity. "The highest possible development of the power of the State with the object of preparing the conditions for the dying out of the State" is now M. Stalin's declared policy. The highest possible development of the State is the practice, the dying out of the State is the theory; and what is the good of dialectical materialism if it cannot prove in case of need that black means white and white black? The withering away of the State plays much the same role in Soviet dogma as the Second Advent in Christian theology. It occupies an essential place in every confession of faith. But since the days of the primitive Church the prospect has not been regarded as imminent or allowed to affect day-to-day practice.

Things in the Soviet Union have not gone quite so easily as that. It has become of late increasingly difficult, even in a country where the suppression of free thought is carried to the pitch of perfection, to disguise the fact that this "highest possible development of the power of the State" has knocked Marxism sideways. The State, it is true, retains the ownership and control of industrial production. But in this respect the Soviet State has only carried to its logical conclusion a development which has also made gigantic strides in many capitalist countries. If (as Engels acutely observed) the taking over of industries by the State is Socialism, then Napoleon, who nationalized the tobacco industry in France, must count as one of the founders of Socialism. In that sense M. Stalin may be permitted to rank with Napoleon. In any other sense his claim to be regarded as a Socialist requires careful scrutiny.

The "principle of Socialism," we are authoritatively informed by the new Soviet Constitution approved last December, is "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work." Between Socialism thus defined and capitalism there seems to be no more than a hair's breadth. After all, the capitalist only takes from the worker "according to his ability" (*la plus belle fille ne peut donner que ce qu'elle a*), and asks for nothing better than to pay him "according to his work," unless the trade unions, more effective in democratic countries than in Soviet Russia, obstruct the adoption of this "Socialist" criterion.

Of the prevalence of such "Socialism" in contemporary Russia there is no doubt. Examples have been given in the preceding article of the immense differentiation of wages and salaries in the Soviet Union. The right of in-

heritance has been restored; deposits in savings banks and investment in State loans (with lottery drawings) are being effectively encouraged; and private incomes derived from "work and savings" are specifically protected by the new Constitution. The creation of privileged grades, whose loyalty to the régime can be counted on, may be either a deliberate part of M. Stalin's policy or a natural consequence of the industrial revolution—or both.

Side by side with the great majority, exclusively bond slaves to labour, there arises a class freed from directly productive labour, which looks after the general affairs of society, the direction of labour, State business, law, science, art, &c.

This description, from the pen of Engels, of the rise of capitalism applies word for word to what is now going on in the Soviet Union. The existence in Soviet Russia of "exploitation" in the Marxist sense can only be denied on the unlikely hypothesis that the will of M. Stalin and the will of the worker are one and the same and that the worker is therefore exploiting himself. But if M. Stalin chooses to apply the label of Socialism to a system which exhibits so many of the most characteristic symptoms of capitalism, none of his compatriots will dare to say him nay.

The capitalist observer need not be disconcerted to discover that Soviet Socialism is, after all, only capitalism writ large. But what of the sincere and intelligent Russian Marxist who remembers the slogans of the glorious revolution of 1917? Trotsky is known to-day in Soviet Russia, not as Lenin's principal coadjutor, but as the first and most wicked of counter-revolutionaries; and to be found in possession of any of his writings is a capital offence. But how many Russians are there who, whether consciously influenced by Trotsky or not, believe with him that the revolution has been "betrayed" by M. Stalin and his bureaucracy? Is there, in this sense, a "Trotskyist opposition"? The question is difficult to answer.

The treason trials of August and January signally failed to prove the existence of a "Trotskyist conspiracy." But it is hard not to believe that many thousands of "old Bolsheviks" perceive to-day that the system evolved by M. Stalin is something very different from the system for which the Bolsheviks fought in 1917, and that the present régime, instead of moving towards the promised land of a classless society with no privileges and with distribution "to each according to his needs," is working night and day to establish and maintain a system based on precisely contrary premises. M. Stalin, who may have an uneasy Marxist conscience, clearly suspects the existence of such a body of opinion; and thousands of unadvertised arrests, in

addition to the notorious ones, have been made in the past two years in the attempt to eradicate this source of disloyalty to the régime.

But most of the victims of the Stalinist terror probably belong to a different category. During the last five years the party line has taken so many hair-pin bends, and the pace has been so hot, that many competitors, with the best will in the world, have failed to stay the course. Such was the sad case of M. Pashukanis, until recently rector of the Institute of Soviet Law and Vice-Commissar of Justice. Down to last December M. Pashukanis had expounded in an able series of lectures and text-books the Marxist-Leninist theory of law. According to this theory, law is an instrument of government in the hands of the ruling class. Like the State itself, it is essentially repressive in character, and is an evil which will ultimately wither away with the State. The Soviet judge, argued M. Pashukanis, was entitled if need be to rise above the letter of the law and decide on the strength of what Lenin called his "revolutionary consciousness of right."

But M. Pashukanis, in his rectorial and vice-commissarial armchair, failed to move with the times. About the end of last year some acute critic (perhaps a professional rival) discovered a flagrant incompatibility between this doctrine and Stalinism. The theory of "the highest development of the power of the State" clearly required the rigid enforcement of State law, whose authority M. Pashukanis was so recklessly undermining. In January M. Pashukanis was

deposed from his official position. His numerous text-books disappeared overnight from circulation, and his teaching was branded as "anarchic." Two months later he was arrested as a wrecker and a Trotskyist. His present whereabouts is unknown.

The case of M. Pashukanis has been quoted, not for its intrinsic importance but because it is typical of what is occurring everywhere in Russia at the present time. Official orthodoxy has performed marvels of prestidigitation in its efforts to adapt Marxist theory to Stalinist practice. Almost everyone who has had the misfortune to write or speak in the Soviet Union on politics, law, art, or letters must have been guilty at some time or other of an utterance which would now be condemned as arrant Trotskyism. Nobody in high place knows when some such utterance may be conjured up from the past to bear witness against him. The orthodoxy of yesterday is the heterodoxy of to-day; and, except for the (much revised) works of Stalin and the (slightly expurgated) works of Lenin, it is virtually impossible to find in any Soviet bookshop to-day any Russian work of a political character published between 1914 and 1934. Most of the pundits of the older dispensation have been put under the ban. Those who have been agile enough to remain in favour ask nothing but forgetfulness for their indiscretions of yesteryear. And in no sphere has the reversal of Soviet policy in the past five years been so abrupt and so complete as in international affairs.

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## SOVIET POLICY ABROAD

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### III.—A CHANGED FACE TO THE WORLD

*This final article on 20 years of Sovietism is devoted to the international aspect of the Russian enigma.*

The maladjustment between the Marxist theory of the "withering away" of the State and the Stalinist practice of the "highest development of the State" is matched in the international field by a corresponding maladjustment between the old Bolshevik slogan of "world revolution" and the Stalinist slogan of "Socialism in a single country." The Marxist theory of revolution assumed that revolution would be world-wide or, at any rate, European. A revolution which did not extend

to an important industrial country like England would, Marx once remarked, be a mere storm in a tea-cup. The establishment of proletarian Communism presupposed the disappearance of national boundaries.

These assumptions were fully shared by the first generation of Bolsheviks. At Brest-Litovsk the Russian negotiators were prodigal of territory and interested only in the most expeditious means to spread Communist propaganda and hasten the coming of revolution in Germany

and western Europe. The Bolsheviks of the heroic age did not think in terms of States. Moscow was not the capital of a State, but the headquarters of the world-wide revolutionary organization of the working-class. Right down to the death of Lenin it was generally admitted that the Soviet State could not maintain itself indefinitely unless the revolution spread westwards; and to propagate revolution was therefore, if only for reasons of self-interest, the primary task of the Soviet Government. As late as 1924 M. Stalin himself, in the now suppressed first edition of his "Questions of Leninism," wrote that "the victorious revolution in one country . . . ought not to be considered as of independent value, but as an auxiliary, a means of hastening the victory of the proletariat in other countries."

But facts were too strong for this ambitious missionary plan. The rest of the world obstinately insisted on remaining divided into national States; and Russia, compelled (if only by way of resistance to attack) to assert her identity against the outsider, assumed perforse the semblance of a national State. In 1921 Lenin retired from the turmoil of "war communism" into the quieter waters of the New Economic Policy, and concluded a trade agreement with Great Britain. This agreement was followed by others. The incompatibility of preaching world revolution in one breath and seeking amicable relations with capitalist States in the next became gradually apparent; and this fundamental maladjustment of Soviet policy came home to roost, nine months after Lenin's death, in the farcical incident of the "Zinoviev letter."

In the next two years the issue of "world revolution" versus "Socialism in a single State" became the chosen battleground between "Trotskyists" and "Stalinists"; and in 1928 M. Stalin celebrated his victory by introducing the first Five-Year Plan. It is a curious fact that a State which is a going concern acquires, independently of its own volition, a sort of vested interest in the political and economic stability of other States. It soon became clear that the worst thing which could happen to the Five-Year Plan would be a political or economic upheaval affecting world prices or the purchasing power of Russia's principal customers. World revolution, far from being the primary objective of Soviet policy, would be a disaster of the first magnitude. The world economic crisis was a period of great anxiety for the directors of the Soviet economy; and if the Soviet Union escaped its worst symptoms the escape was due not to its peculiar political organization (Palestine is another instance of a country untouched by the economic crisis),

but to the progress of the industrial revolution described in the first of these articles. Now, on the eve of the third Five-Year Plan, Soviet economists are trembling lest their careful calculations should once more be thrown out of gear by a change in the gold policy of the leading capitalist countries, the Soviet Union having become the second largest producer of gold. Since 1928 the international reactions of Soviet Russia have been precisely similar to those of any ordinary capitalist State.

A further development came when Germany and Japan left Geneva in 1933. Menaced by the growing turbulence of these two "dissatisfied" Powers, the Soviet Union took the last step in the transformation from international rebel into international conservative. The State whose professed ideological basis is the "dynamic" creed of dialectical materialism joined the "static" group of respectable, satisfied Powers, and became a member of what M. Chicherin always elaborately referred to as "the so-called League of Nations." Since that time no member of the Council of the League has been more insistent on the importance of keeping things as they are, or more cautious in deprecating the most distant allusion to the one article of the Covenant which hints at the possibility of international change, than M. Litvinov. It is the last and most remarkable metamorphosis of the most dramatic revolution of modern times.

Meanwhile the Communist International, founded in the hectic days of 1919, when world revolution seemed—and not only to its supporters—a probable and perhaps imminent event, has fallen sadly from its former glory; and bourgeois Governments all over the world no longer tremble at its name. In the first years of the régime, Comintern held regular annual congresses in Moscow which rang with the familiar denunciations of the capitalist system. But after the inauguration of the first Five-Year Plan in 1928 no further congress was convened for seven years. Denunciations of capitalist countries were no longer a convenient accompaniment of the policy of "Socialism in a single State." In 1935, however, Comintern rather unexpectedly revived in a new guise, no longer as the *enfant terrible*, but as the obedient agent, of Soviet foreign policy. Fascism had supplanted capitalism as the enemy of the proletariat. The British or French or American worker striking against his capitalist employer can no longer count on the support, material or even moral, of Comintern. The French Communist is adjured from Moscow not to vote against the military budgets even of a Right Government in France. The British Com-

unist is urged to seek a common front with those Labour leaders whom he had previously learned to denounce as the worst enemies of the working class. The Chinese Communist is ordered to cooperate with Chiang Kai-shek, formerly known as the butcher of the Chinese revolution, for the purpose of resistance to Japan. The present policy of Comintern rests on the assumption that the political exigencies of the Soviet State are identical with the world-wide interests of the working class as a whole. It is not surprising that this assumption should be made by a body whose seat is in Moscow and whose non-Russian members have always regarded loyalty to the party line as their first duty. It is also not surprising that, outside the Soviet Union, the assumption should have found readier acceptance among Left intellectuals than among the workers themselves.

The foreign policy of Soviet Russia and the policy of Comintern depend therefore no longer on principles which can be found in Marxist text-books, but on the same considerations of enlightened self-interest which determine the foreign policies of democratic or Fascist countries. Adherence to the party line is none the less rigidly enforced. One semi-official explanation of the recent execution of the eight generals is not that they were in the pay of Germany (for this story, though official, seems to reflect too much discredit on the intelligence of those who appointed them to the highest military posts), but that they were advocating a *rapprochement* with Germany. The explanation is not plausible; for Marshal Tukhachevsky in particular was known for his devotion to the Franco-Soviet Pact and his support of a Franco-Soviet military alliance. But it is true enough that the firing-squad or penal servitude would at the present time await anyone in the Soviet Union who, however honestly, advocated German-Soviet friendship (just as it would have awaited, before 1933, anyone who proposed that the Soviet Union should join the League of Nations). Whether the party line is based on principle or pure opportunism, deviation from it is equally fatal to the deviator.

This is not to say that the foreign policy of Soviet Russia will not change. The theory that the Soviet Government is interested in the creation of a "Left front" for the defence of democracy against Fascism is a Western invention which receives no support from the official exponents of Soviet policy. The present enemies

of the Soviet Union are the so-called Fascist States; and Soviet propaganda can therefore be directed against Fascism as a whole. But if one of the Fascist States were to detach itself from the group the Soviet Government would welcome the friendship of the seceder as cordially and wholeheartedly as that of any democratic country.

There was a period of Soviet-Italian friendship in 1930 when M. Litvinov visited Rome and clinked glasses with Signor Mussolini. The student of international affairs will not exclude from his speculations a possible recurrence of this pleasing episode. If the Sovt Government saw a favourable opportunity of securing the assistance of Japan against Germany, or of Germany against Japan, it would be no reason to shrink from such a step. Conversely, if a Right, or even a professedly Fascist, Government came into power in France, this would not, in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, affect Franco-Soviet friendship provided the foreign policy of France remained unchanged. The desire to line up against one another the conflicting ideologies of contemporary Europe belongs entirely to Herr Hitler, not to M. Stalin.

Of the aggressive Asiatic policy which was once so exasperating a thorn in the side of Lord Curzon, scarcely a trace remains. It is many years now since a congress of Eastern peoples swearing a holy crusade against the British Empire was held on Russian soil. If Comintern still nourishes a hope that the oppressed peoples of Africa and Asia will rise against the white capitalist, it keeps this ambition discreetly to itself. Of late years the Soviet Government has pursued a forward policy only on what is nominally Chinese soil—in Outer Mongolia and in Sinkiang; and its successful efforts to plant Soviet influence there were probably inspired by the fear of being anticipated by Japan rather than by any native urge to expand.

The Soviet Government has its hands full at home. Fear of Germany and Japan is an effective curb on ambitions abroad. In spite of a momentary breeze at the Montreux Conference last year, there is at the present time serious clash anywhere between British and Soviet interests, except in so far as Soviet influence in France diminishes the prospects of a settlement with Germany. Present Soviet policy, domestic and foreign, may well puzzle the orthodox Communist. But the capitalist will no easily be convinced that it contains any new reform salvation hitherto undiscovered by the capitalist world.

# UNDER STALIN

## MOSCOW SINCE THE TRIALS

### I.—BACK TO THE MIDDLE AGES

From Our Special Correspondent

"Life has come better, comrades; life has become more buoyous." Stalin said so last year; and his words were found sufficiently lapidary to take their place in the official Russian-English primer in immediate juxtaposition with such commonplaces of Soviet conversation as "Long live the world revolution!" and "Had not we better take tram?" The words were true when he said them. At the moment despite the continued improvement in the material conditions of life in Russia, they are out of date.

In the summer of 1936 there was an anomalous whiff of freedom in the Soviet air. The régime showed signs of mellowing. Politics obtruded less and leavened the life of the common man. The wave of terrorism occasioned by the murder of Kirov (an irrelevant neurotic with an urge for martyrdom) had virtually spent itself. It looked as though the "moderates" in the small oligarchy of Stalin's advisers were getting their way. A man had even been sanctioned (though this unprecedented step was and still is a secret) for the publication in Moscow of a periodical whose contributors, though naturally they were to be carefully selected, could write as they pleased. Then came, out of the blue, the arrest of Kameneff, Zinovieff, and others who had done much to ensure the success of the revolution. Tukhatchevsky, Pyatakov, and several more of the military were soon known to be implicated. In due course both batches were tried, in a glare of daring publicity; 29 of them were shot; and shock was put back to the Middle Ages, to whomsoever epochs the police chief Yagoda and many other men of consequence have since been covered to belong. The effect of the "Trotsky" trials, of which lesser counterparts are claimed and are still claiming locally prominent victims all over a sixth of the earth's land surface, has been tremendous. Of the external effect—the damage to Russian prestige abroad and the sudden emergence from limbo

into legend of Trotsky and the Fourth International—it is not the purpose of this article to treat. The internal effect is far more important.

Every evening, when it begins to get dark, the hooded crows come home from their suburban scavenging to roost in the heart of Moscow. As they pass, cawing abstractedly, high over the Red Square they must take very much for granted the long drab queue of Russians strung out under the Kremlin wall. It is there every evening, its component parts stamping their feet against the cold as they file slowly into the blood-red marble mausoleum where Lenin lies embalmed. To the crows this pilgrimage, half-curious and half-pious, presents its customary aspect; but if they flew lower and observed more closely they would note a change, made within the last few months and wholly typical of Russia's current mood. There were always two sentries with fixed bayonets facing each other across the entrance to the tomb; and they are there still, a compliment to the dead rather than a restraint on the living. But the hallowed spot has now more active wardens. As the pilgrims, two abreast, approach the steps, they run the gauntlet of two vigilant militiamen. Every bulging pocket is made to yield its contents for inspection—a packet of cigarettes, a book, a hunk of bread. Anyone carrying a bundle or a brief-case is sent to deposit it on the far side of the square; and the men are told to take their hats off. This scrutiny is carried out with extreme thoroughness; and lest some engine of destruction should have escaped the notice of the two militiamen, an OGPU officer, assisted by a plain-clothes detective, is stationed beyond them on the steps of the tomb, where the bewildered pilgrims undergo a last and even closer inspection. Even Lenin's bones now require a bodyguard.

It is a small thing, but it is symptomatic of the atmosphere of intensified suspicion and fear

pervading the vast bureaucracy of which Moscow is the centre. The Kremlin is now closed to visitors. Intercourse between foreigners and Russians has been reduced, in the interest of the latter, to a minimum. In Moscow anecdotes about dictaphones play the same part in conversation as they do in Berlin. All this, of course, is a matter of degree, a temporary firmer application of those methods of repression on which the Soviet experiment has wisely and successfully relied. What is interesting in the current phase is that it is no longer, strictly speaking, a question of repression. The common people, the underdogs, feel themselves relatively safe; for the first time membership of the Communist Party (which indeed carries risks almost as great in 1937 as they were under the Tsar) is not a wholly enviable state. It is the people's leaders, the men whom they have been sedulously trained to regard as heroes, who are trembling if not toppling before the latest fashion in proscriptions.

The impeachment of Yagoda was predictable from the moment of his supersession by Yezhov; for the quantity and nature of the evidence which the police were obliged to produce in order to convict the Trotskyists, though it may have reflected credit on their powers of invention, reflects (assuming that it was true) very little on their powers of prevention. How long Trotskyism will remain in vogue as an indictment is uncertain and unimportant. A heresy by any other name will stink as foul in the nostrils of the orthodox, and there are signs that the task of eliminating all remotely potential opponents, not so much of the existing order as of the existing personnel at the top, will go briskly forward until, like other phases of Soviet policy, its inexpediency is found to outweigh its advantages. In particular this month's elections to the Communist Party, in which a secret ballot is to be used for the first time, are likely to result in the sporadic dislodgment of local bosses and their satellites all over the Union. The Societ régime has created a plutocracy of power; and part of the eager ferocity with which that plutocracy is now being turned inside out is due to the personal ambitions of the iconoclasts, for denunciation creates vacancies and brings rewards.

Nobody outside the Politburo is safe—and not all the 10 men inside it. Key men vanish overnight; and in those who do not the Russian's instinctive desire to shirk responsibility is being developed into an obsession. Very few persons of consequence, unless they are extremely young, have consciences which can by the current standards be considered clear. The Old Bolsheviks and their associates have inherited

a tradition and technique which assort ill with their contemporary responsibilities. Save for those to whom the plums of office have fallen, they have—not unnaturally—an unconquerable instinct for intrigue, for discussion and criticism, for the backstairs if not for bombs. They do not thrive under a dictatorship.

Also (here the circle widens) a dictatorship makes its mistakes. In 1932-33, for instance, normal methods of terrorism having failed Stalin's Government broke the back of the peasants' resistance to collectivization by starving some millions of them to death in the North Caucasus, the Ukraine, and parts of Central Asia: deliberately, not through inefficiency. The experiment was a bold one, though quite in keeping with the traditions of a semi-Asiatic land which has always been cheerfully lavish when it thinks of human life in terms of the State's interests. And the experiment succeeded. But before it did so there was hardly a responsible man in Russia who had not—for speech was freer in those days—been in contact, if not necessarily in agreement, with those who criticized Stalin. That in itself is enough to make a man, under the present dispensation, a Trotskyist. If you are not a Trotskyist you may be a wrecker. Wrecker equals bungler. Bungler equals one who connived at bungling. "Connived at" equals "might and therefore should have been aware of." Since most Russians have a talent, developed in many cases to the pitch of genius, for bungling, it will be seen how fast and far these ripples spread.

From these concentric waves of panic the Red Army stands—or stood until very recently—virtually aloof. Composed for the most part of conscripts selected, very carefully, from an almost unlimited reserve of man power, the military class alone owes—and delights to owe—an intelligent loyalty to a fixed ideal. Writers, film producers, jurists—specialists in all civilian activities—sickened or stultified by the necessity to subscribe to an ever-changing ideology, walk delicately and get nowhere. The soldiers, dressed well but no longer so noticeably better than the crowd, are masters—within limits—of their souls; and they know it. Signs of separatist tendencies, of a split between Stalin and Voroshilov, are wholly wanting, though imaginative sources in Warsaw and elsewhere find a ready market—particularly in Berlin—for rumours along these lines. Stories of friction between the Red Army and the OGPU are less unfounded, though not less unconfirmed. But the political orthodoxy of the Army, including its faith in an ultimate world revolution, is beyond question.

Its "political officers" were originally party spies entrusted with the supervision of units comprising many former Tsarist soldiers and other men whose devotion to the revolutionary cause was a somewhat doubtful quantity. To-day their role is less important. Half the population of the Soviet Union has entered the world since Nicholas II was hurried out of it. Two decades of mass propaganda have left their mark. Conscripts are selected judiciously from the soundest elements in the population and undergo fairly intensive pre-conscription training in the ranks of the Octobrists, the Pioneers, the Comsosmols, and other Communist youth organizations. The task of the political officers is now accordingly educational rather than disciplinary, and distinctive arm-badges emphasize the fact that they

are no longer spies. (There have, however, during the past few weeks been indications of a reversion to the old uneasy system.)

The "Workers' and Peasants' Red Army" has indeed been considerably transformed. Saluting (formerly taboo as a symbol of the soulless repression prevailing among imperialist legionaries) has been restored in its full rigour. The smart officers dancing the "Hesitation" waltz with appalling seriousness in the Metropole, or queuing up for a manicure at the Institute of Cosmetics and Hygiene, are not easily identifiable as either workers or peasants. But Russia's self-confidence in her military might does not, to the casual observer, appear misplaced.

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## REPRESSION WITH A DIFFERENCE

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### II.—THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LUCKY

It is a strange world in which the Russians live, but it undoubtedly suits most of them. They are, as they have not forgiven M. André Gide for pointing out, even less free, even more rigidly controlled, than the Germans. But they are also on the whole more unqualified in their enthusiasm for the régime under which they live. There is a big difference between the effect of 20 years of isolation and propaganda on a backward semi-Asiatic people and four years of the same treatment on a civilized European nation.

It is not merely because the Ogpu has been longer and harder at work than the Gestapo that you hear much less grumbling in Russia than you do in Germany. The propaganda through which Soviet ideology is expressed, unlike its Nazi counterpart, breathes more of hope than of hate. In spite of the complete absence of personal liberty there is a cocky, expansive, sentimental exuberance behind the drab or tawdry setting of the Russian scene. Territorial size has a lot to do with it. Glamour surrounds the Arctic regions (one and a half times as large as the Indian Empire), where the Red Flag now flies over the North Pole. It is not in every Russian's nature to exult automatically at the latest triumphs of industrial construction; but few can withstand a feeling of complacency when they contem-

plate the vast and various areas controlled by the cause to which they belong. The adventurous type of young German, prevented by currency restrictions from travelling abroad farther than the statutory 10 marks will take him, will wistfully admit to feeling cramped; the Russian, whom duty or pleasure may send anywhere from the Celestial Mountains and the bright bazaars of Samarkand to the forests of Trans-Baikalia or to some mushroom outpost upon the sledged tundra, is in very different case.

A corollary to geographical spaciousness is ethnological diversity. The Russians, exempt from racial prejudice, have always "got on well with the natives"; and the young Communist feels a kind of vague pride in his more exotic fellow-workers under the Red Flag. For several days in March Moscow was wildly excited by the arrival of half-a-dozen Buryat Mongolian girls (incongruously but inevitably accompanied by a "political leader"), who had taken the unusual step of skiing to the capital from their homes, a distance of some 3,000 miles; and behind the gushing superlatives with which this feat was hailed it was possible to sense something of the genuinely romantic exaltation which the new Russian Empire arouses in its awakened citizens. German love for the fatherland is, however martially expressed, an

introvert and domestic sentiment, a kind of brave nostalgia; the corresponding feeling in Russia is adventurous and extrovert, a pioneering, look-what-we've-got-here ebullience.

Although a comparison of the Nazi and the Soviet régimes can be of only academic interest, it is perhaps worth noting two or three suggestive contrasts. A fundamental one, of course, is the standard of living, which is rising in Russia and falling, or at best stationary, in Germany. Another is a corollary to foregoing remarks about propaganda. An Englishman probably sees, at the first glance, little difference between a Comsomol reading the *Pravda* and a Nazi student reading the *Angriff*, since he feels equally sorry for two young men who both have to do without a free Press. But the difference is there. It lies in the fact that, whereas the Comsomol, but for the Russian revolution, would probably not have been able to read at all, the German student, but for the Nazi revolution, would have been able to read any newspaper he pleased. It is broadly true to say that Stalin's dictatorship has stimulated intellectual and artistic life in Russia, whereas Hitler's has had the opposite effect in Germany. The average standard of German education and culture is still far higher than the average standard in Russia; but in the latter country literature, the theatre, and the cinema, for all that their exponents must walk the ideological tightrope, are full of life and vigour. In a Moscow bookshop you may find a dearth of new books, for every first edition is sold out on sight; but you will not find, as you would in Berlin, that most of the new books are translations from foreign languages and that no young authors of consequence are represented on the shelves.

The statement that the Soviet régime is even more closely repressive than the Nazi régime needs one qualification. A Slav bureaucracy, however soulless and tyrannical on paper, must always in practice have a certain margin of softness or elasticity. You have to be lucky—very lucky nowadays—to benefit from this margin; but it is there, just as it would be under a Chinese or an Irish dictatorship. Inefficiency, absent-mindedness, nepotism, corruption, or sheer good nature: these things are latent somewhere in the system. They are in the air in Russia; and that is one reason why the Russians cannot take their rulers quite so seriously as the Germans are obliged to take theirs.

A very important element in the Soviet citizen's existence is luck. In his world, windfalls or disasters are for ever in the offing, governing almost everything from the availability of goloshes to his execution for treason. He has

adapted himself to this state of affairs, and there is a fatalistic, semi-Oriental streak in his character which finds it natural and congenial. Both deliberately and involuntarily the régime encourages this streak. The gigantic administrative machine sets out to control every aspect of every activity of every one of its subjects. But it is not a very good machine. Its impact on the citizen, arbitrary already in conception, is rendered doubly so in practice by its erratic working. Uncertainty permeates the Russian's life. Fish, let us say, becomes suddenly unprocurable, none can say why, in all his local shops; and his wife devotes the whole of what is technically known as her leisure to the pursuit of this delicacy. She is not surprised, she is hardly even annoyed, that it should be temporarily impossible to buy fish. She stands in queues, she follows up rumours; and when at last she tracks down a shop which, again for no discoverable reason, is bursting with fish she tastes a keen and compensatory triumph.

Wages are appallingly low. The average wage for the whole Union is about 230 roubles a month. Prices are correspondingly high. But there are all kinds of bonuses and privileges to be won by the deserving from the State; and though you may not be particularly deserving yourself, perhaps your daughter or your brother is. A son may come home to find that his father has been arrested; but, equally, a father may come home to find that his boy has been selected to play the hero in a children's film at 400 roubles a month. Anyone from a charwoman to a poet may, either through diligence or by sheer good luck, wake up to find himself temporarily affluent. The State contrives to double the roles of fairy godmother and demon king, popping up out of trap-doors all over the place, keeping hope alive as well as fear. The Russians, helpless as passengers on a switchback, derive a certain zest from taking the ups with the downs.

Material conditions continue to improve. The man in the street in Moscow—and in Moscow he really is in the street, part of a procession as endless as the insomniac's sheep, for he has in four cases out of five no other place where he can agreeably spend his leisure—the man in the street no longer looks, in the social sense of the word, distressed. The late spring, with its alternating frost and slush, submits the Muscovite wardrobe to the last of several tests whose severity and importance are but little apparent to Russia's summer visitors; and these tests are undergone, with success if not always with insouciance, by most of the heavy overcoats and by most of the goloshes and felt boots. The process of architectural transfiguration is half completed at the centre and sketched ambitiously at

the outskirts; the sound of hammering is as pervasive as the cicada's song elsewhere. The aspect of the city as a whole is Wellsian in intention. But the Kremlin, from which Russia and all that is controlled, retains perhaps symbolically inviolate its bastion and Asiatic outline.

The surface of the main streets has improved, and only just in time. Where five years ago Juggernaut could only be a diplomatic car or a superannuated piece of plunder, to-day the feckless crowd is learning wisdom from a stream of cars conducted in the Cossack tradition. The new M.1, a four-cylinder 42 h.p. saloon built to slightly modified Ford specifications, is a marvel no longer; but here and there a little group gapes at the more exclusive, the so far almost nonexistent ZIZ 101 (the factory produces one a day, with luck) as a decade ago they gaped at a tractor.

And of course there is the Metro. It is still—though Russians will not believe this—a miniature underground system; but it is a remarkable phenomenon. In the case of this show-piece the problem of maintenance has seemingly for once been solved. The stolid, unregarding faces of the passengers correspond closely enough—despite fur hats, high boots, and that exotic shagginess which invests most Muscovites in winter—with their abstracted counterparts in a London Tube. The Metro has dwindled from a magic toy to an amenity. And yet, surprisingly, the trains run smoothly; the escalators work; and the stations, each guarded by four policemen, are kept clean and bright. All this is hardly less unexpected than an advertisement, displayed in the principal station, recommending that product of an arch-Imperialist's mind, "The Jungle Book."

The shop windows are full, light industry is getting into its stride. The big department stores are always crowded; yet a close observer will note that the actual conclusion of a purchase is a comparatively rare event. Queues are now scarce in Moscow, though they are common in the provinces owing to the hopeless inadequacy of the Soviet system of distribution. "The Express Trains," wrote Baedeker in 1914, "sometimes attain a speed of 30 or 40 miles per hour"; and Baedeker is not noticeably out of date as yet. Almost all trains, even for short journeys on main lines, are late as a matter of course; much later in winter than in summer. The Government claim that there is no unemployment. This is not quite true. A fairly large nomadic class drifts perpetually up and down the avenues of red tape, occasionally making

half-hearted efforts to find a niche for themselves in the communal life. Apart from this, the "no unemployment" claim needs a footnote to the effect that it still takes five Russians to do a job which in most European countries would be left to two or perhaps three employees.

On the Moscow streets possible signs of under-nourishment are rarer than unmistakable symptoms of intoxication. The Soviet equivalent of Saturday night is observed expensively by the "new bourgeoisie," a caste—since Russia knows no classes—whose connexion with the toiling proletariat is not superficially discernible. The brawny, bright-eyed herculean workers who straddle across the propaganda posters are not to be found on the dance-floors where hoary tangos are essayed with ill-concealed and engaging anxiety by bureaucrats, technical experts, Red Army officers, and visitant bigwigs from centres where there are no opportunities for extravagance. Both sexes dress ambitiously; neither, as yet, surpasses the standard of sartorial smartness customary among domestic servants in this country.

In a way the most impressive and attractive people in Russia are the old women. Shawled, wrinkled, and irrepressible, they browbeat officials, disobey and answer back police on point duty, and generally bring a shrewd good-natured common sense to bear on the myriad problems of living Through the Looking Glass. They are not of the régime (how refreshing it is to hear them upbraid the shop assistant as "young man" instead of "comrade"), and they are not going to stand more nonsense from it than they can help. But they recognize the worth of what it does for the children through free education, physical culture, doctoring, and the like. Many of them still practise their religion.

A small but beautiful church in a provincial town sticks in the memory. The rich hangings and ikons were inviolate. The interior, dimly lit by candles, was warm. The old ladies with a sprinkling of old men, went through the complicated genuflexions of the Greek Orthodox service as fervently as though they had not just finished a hard day's work. The priest and his acolytes chanted, invisible behind the altar screen. The friendly peasant faces were rapt and remote. Here at last, in the loud, specious, disconcerting hurly-burly of Soviet life, was an oasis of certainty, where irrelevant, unregarded people clung to sure and comforting beliefs. In four visits to Russia I have never seen any place kept half as clean as that church.

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